DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 361 237 SO 022 724

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TITLE Some Guidelines for the Development of Curriculum for Applied Anthropology.
PUB DATE 91
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Anthropology in Community Colleges (Akron, OH, October 2-6, 1991). Dot matrix type, best copy available.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Anthropology; *Curriculum Development; *Curriculum Problems; Educational Objectives; Higher Education; Intellectual Disciplines; Problem Solving; Public Policy; Relevance (Education); Social Scientists
IDENTIFIERS *Applied Anthropology

ABSTRACT

Applied anthropology seeks to integrate anthropological values and knowledge with a rational approach to policy decision-making. This paper discusses some of the barriers faced by those who care about anthropology and are concerned with making a viable space for the discipline in the college curriculum. Anthropology teachers need to further refine what they do and what they are actually capable of doing. Teachers are encouraged to be honest and realistic in their dealings with students in promoting, marketing, and advocating applied anthropology. The paper concludes by raising a series of questions concerning the discipline of applied anthropology and its role in the curriculum, including: Is the activity designed to change individuals' attitudes, values, norms, or beliefs? What are the possible manifest and latent consequences of change of values? And is the activity designed to change the structure of the cultural and social institutions? (DB)

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SOME GUIDELINES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF CURRICULUM FOR APPLIED ANTHROPOLOGY

SOCIETY FOR ANTHROPOLOGY IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES
OCTOBER 2-6, 1991
AKRON, OHIO

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Applied anthropology seeks to respond to the need for a systematic approach to problem solving and to its obverse side, policy decision making. The situation has become urgent because after years of assertion otherwise, it is clear that neither sociology nor psychology has, no matter how they stretch their limits, any broad based answers to the societal and system problems of either the developed or less developed nations of the world. Whether we are talking about poverty, housing, the schools, crime, modernization, ethnic conflict, or any and all of the range of problems of the contemporary world or the future, it is clear that a holistic approach is required.

Applied anthropology seeks to integrate an anthropological system of values based on cultural relativity with a knowledge base of a tremendous number of ethnographies into a cybernetic synthesis of action that revolves around rational policy formation, human scale program planning, empathic implementation, and evaluation leading to further effort.

But, let us start off by being perfectly honest. Applied anthropology is at least in part a tool of the rationalization of the continuation and expansion of the curriculum in anthropology in the face of:

1. declining number of cultures available, particularly exotic ones that fascinate the observer and the reader,

2. the bad rap the anthropologist has gotten for his involvement in the Vietnam War,

3. increased competition from the other social sciences which have adopted both the content and methodology of the field,

4. declining enrollments,

5. increased push for applied work, particularly from funding agencies,

6. the conservation/preservation/ecology movement, and

7. the lack of attrition in academic settings, combined with a reduction of scarce resources that seriously impinge on the available non-academic employment slots.

The conservation/preservation movement combined with the minimal (politically correct) awareness of the rapid deterioration of virtually all parts of the environment has encouraged the anthropologist to extrapolate from his knowledge base with neo-missionary zeal to attempt to save the world from itself. The applied anthropologist, having

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allegedly learned from the errors of the "action" social scientists of the war on poverty era, is allegedly more circumspect in his pronouncements of exactly the amount of repair or correction that can be made. He veils his prowess by indicating the native's own ability to teach the world its salvation (and the anthropologist's ability to translate and interpret).

It should be noted than many of those who indicate that they are applied or practical anthropologists are working in areas unrelated to their education or training, except in a very general sense. When asked, they give responses that rationalize the "fit" between being a trained anthropologist and their ability to deal with a wide variety of personalities, cultures, and to develop a "holistic" perspective. It is probably the case that these individuals would do just as well in their positions without a degree in anthropology. These "positions" are likely to be in management, administration, or organizational analysis, hence, the concern and interest in policies and programs.

While it is difficult to deny that an anthropological education, particularly with field work experience, gives one a unique perspective on most human endeavors, it should also be recognized that anthropology students are a self-selected sample with proclivities and predispositions toward viewing the world and at least most of its inhabitants as worthwhile.

Not unrelated are the questions that should be asked of those who drop out of anthropology at the beginning, or even before the beginning, that is, after one or two horrible experiences with instructors (present company excluded), as the result of a bad field experience, because someone made them jump through one too many hoops ("you can't do anything without the doctorate), or because of a generalized disenchantment with the content or the approach which often still has sexist, racist, and elitist overtones.

In many respects, the more conservative [sic] anthropologist has a more realistic approach to both the latent as well as the manifest consequences of his possible interventions and manipulations. It is to this balanced and considered trend that this paper is dedicated.

In addition, the relative lack of success, in spite of well intended enthusiasm), of both the Peace Corps and Vista (orchestrated mediated presentations aside) due to a lack of understanding of the bigger pictures created a fertile area of "you never asked, but if you had, the anthropologist would have told you" that it wouldn't work.

It should be pointed out that while the anthropologist generally (my emphasis) considers him/herself a political liberal or even radical oriented toward change, he is

generally very conservative, almost reactionary, when it comes to the knowledge base from which he works and actually seeks to maintain the cultural status quo of the field. Even the young turks, while attacking some of the conclusions, motivations, or even the reporting/observations of the field's forefathers/mothers give very little thought to whether the tried and true techniques or assumptions of anthropology are appropriate for applied anthropology.

The issue of policy decision making is a case in point. The applied anthropologist's need for involvement at all levels should be clear, but the reluctance "to go native" has meant that he does not force his way into all aspects of the operation, and then wonders why "it" didn't come out the way it should have. The push to change behavior without disrupting values, norms, and beliefs often makes any change temporary at best.

Paraphrasing C. Wright Mills, we make public issues out private problems when we think it could mean a grant or a supported job, and further, if we can make it a public policy issue by making people believe that governmental action is the only way of responding to this self definition, there is more of an opportunity to get involved in the whole "ball of string".

Anthropologists typically look at decision making as though it were an organic process, related to generalized historical antecedents. Success of cultural coping mechanisms for dealing with crises is sometimes explored, but only if the informant or indigenous group brings it up, and even then it can be missed because it is often hidden in folk tales, myth, or quasi-bureaucracy, and is not perceived as adaptive. Adaptive behaviors, for even those who do not subscribe to that theoretical perspective, are observed only within the anthropologist's preconceived parameters. Much behavior, such as standing alone and not saying anything, is often not even seen.

Further, because of our sense of product opposed to process orientation, in spite of protestations to the contrary, we often do not report the intermediate steps in many cognitive processes. Maybe even important, we have the unfortunate bias of reporting out the values, norms, and decision making only on a post hoc basis, i.e., after something has happened. If nothing happens, there is often no report of an "incident". Theoretical modeling is rarely part of our training or analysis of ethnographic reporting. We also have, joining in the popular cultural, politically correct habit, spent undo emphasis on extremes of the wild swings and extremes of the results of past events.

There is a popular tendency, which the applied anthropologist has supported, to believe that policy makers

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operate in a manner to preserve only self-interest. Left to their own devices, so the reasoning goes, very little good ever comes out. The applied anthropologist is thus uniquely positioned, based upon fieldwork with "hostile natives" to gain the confidence of these elites and cause positive change to occur. The idea that the anthropologist can either through logic and rational presentation or subterfuge and connivance convince the policy maker to mend his wicked ways is accepted as part of the creed.

There is implicit in this affirmation of faith that the anthropologist, were he or she in that position, would act more humanely, and that, as we tell our students, anthropology is somehow a wonderful way to climb the ladder to chief honcho of whatever. By this logic we should establish anthropological monasteries and convents or Executive Masters of Anthropological Administration programs (EMMA) for C.E.O.'s

I am not saying that there is no role for the applied anthropologist; the opposite, rather; we need to further refine that which we are and that which we are actually capable of doing. We, as teachers, need to be honest and realistic in our dealings with our students in promoting, marketing and advocating applied anthropology. The relative success of a few large scale projects in community and organizational development should not give us untempered confidence in which we say is/would be the outcomes of additional activity that we allege is applied anthropology.

We need to address the reliability of the predictability of any action taken. If we have learned anything from our fieldwork, it is that the cultural milieu and cultural change is in each situation unique. We need to look at that which has been successful in which specific circumstances all along the continuum of policy formulation, program planning, implementation, and evaluation, not from a case study or anecdotal perspective, but as tools for theory and methodology building. We must be constantly aware of which symbolic and other required, personal, and emergent interactional systems are operative at all levels of the social system.

Allow me, therefore, to offer an oversimplified checklist for those trying to decide whether applied anthropology is appropriate, and therefore, for which the pedagogy should be further developed.

* Is the activity (applied anthropology) designed to change individual attitudes, values, norms or beliefs?

* Might the activity, even though not intended to, change affective and cognitive components?

* What are the possible manifest and latent

consequences of change of values...etc?

* Is the activity designed to change patterns of behavior or interaction in groups, organizations, associations, or of institutions?

* Is the activity designed to change the structure of the cultural and social institutions?

The value judgments of changes to the good, bad, adaptive, or otherwise are beyond the scope of this discussion, but need to be examined without making the assumption that our characterizations of same are correct.

These questions, as the rest of the discussion, is proffered to help us be watchful in our dealings with people, allow us to evaluate our activities in the field, and give us direction through the complex process of policy foundation, program planning, implementation and evaluation as we develop functional curricula for our students.

Several Final Thoughts

I would not want to think that we as applied anthropologists would be just using people either in terms of having them as guinea pigs or in terms of maintaining a market for our services.

I would also not like to think that we seek to change or not to change others for the sake of change or preservation of the status quo at whatever costs, or for the sake of some conceived idea of efficiency, modernity, or noble savage.

We need to examine the potential of the whole range of anthropological involvement from a hands-off, non-interference and preservation by non-revelation and disinformation all the way to attempting the completely change a culture, all along the way maintaining the highest possible standard of ethics and humaneness.

In summary, we need to remember that we are dealing with human lives and history and if we are all part of one interdependent system, we cannot remember the axiom in the negative of Rabbi Hillel, "Do not do unto others, as you would not have done unto you".

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